REMARKS

The Office Action mailed November 18, 2003 has been carefully reviewed and, in view of the above amendments and following remarks, reconsideration and allowance of the application are respectfully requested.

I. Summary of Claims

Claims 1-35 are currently pending in the application, with claims 1, 17, and 31 being independent claims. No claims are added or cancelled, and each of independent claims 1, 17, and 31 are amended. Accordingly, claims 2-16, 18-30, and 32-35 remain in their original, as-filed condition.

All pending claims were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103 as being unpatentable over the combination of U.S. Patent Number 5,083,361 to Rudy, U.S. Patent Number 4,025,974 to Lea, et al., and U.S. Patent Number 5,993,585 to Goodwin, et al.

II. The Claims Patentably Distinguish Over The Applied Prior Art

Whereas Rudy does not disclose the manner of manufacturing the bladder, Goodwin discloses that a multiple step process may be utilized. More particularly, Goodwin discloses that (1) a first sheet is preformed with a thermoforming apparatus to form sidewalls and a lower surface of the bladder; (2) the first sheet is removed from the thermoforming apparatus and placed within a laminating apparatus; (3) a double-walled fabric core is placed within a concave area formed by the first sheet; (4) a second sheet is placed over the core; (5) a laminating apparatus then compresses and heats the first sheet, second sheet, and core to bond the outer layers of the core to the first and second sheets; (6) a sealing die is then utilized to bond the first sheet and second sheet around the periphery of the core to seal the bladder. As discussed above, therefore, the Goodwin involves a plurality of discrete steps and devices that form the sidewalls, bond the core to the sheets, and form the peripheral bond.

Lea involves a method of manufacturing a mattress that includes securing sheets of polymer material within a frame and placing a foam member between the sheets. A pair of hot press platens then contact the sheets to bond the sheets to the foam material. In addition, peripheral portions of the sheets are bonded with the platens. Referring to Figure 18, the sheets and foam material are shown between the platens. Although the platens contact the upper and

lower surfaces of the mattress and contact the sheets to form the bond around the periphery of the mattress, the platens are not depicted as contacting the sheets to form the sidewall. Air is then evacuated from the interior to compress the sheets against the foam material and further bond the sheets to opposite sides of the foam material. Finally, the mattress may be pressurized through a valve.

Each of the independent claims generally recite a method for forming a fluid-filled bladder that utilizes a single molding operation to (1) bond a pair of sheets of thermoplastic material to opposite sides of a core, (2) form a sidewall of the bladder from one of the sheets, and (3) compress the sheets together around a periphery of the core to form a peripheral bond. The mold that forms the bladder includes a first portion and a second portion. The first portion bonds one of the thermoplastic sheets to the core and forms the sidewall. The second portion bonds the other of the thermoplastic sheets to the core. With regard to formation of the sidewall, independent claims 1 and 31 recite that the first portion of the mold *contacts* the first sheet around the periphery of the core to form a sidewall of the bladder. Similarly, independent claim 17 recites that the first portion of the mold *contacts* a second part of the first sheet to form the second part of the first sheet into a sidewall of the bladder. In contrast with Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea, therefore, the claims recite a single molding operation wherein the mold *contacts* one of the thermoplastic sheets to form the sidewall.

The rejection utilizes Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea to purportedly demonstrate that the method is obvious in light of the references. The rejection, however, does not demonstrate the reason why one skilled in the relevant art would arrive at the claimed invention when reviewing the references. That is, the rejection does not demonstrate that the concept of utilizing a single mold that bonds the sheets to the core, contacts one of the sheets to form the sidewall, and forms the peripheral bond would be obvious from the references. The rejection, therefore, presents no line of reasoning as to why a person skilled in the relevant art, when reviewing only the collective teachings of the references, would have found it obvious to selectively pick and choose various elements and/or concepts from the references to arrive at the claimed invention. In other words, the rejection does little more than cite Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea to show that one or more elements, when each is viewed in a vacuum, may be known.

Based upon the above discussion, the Applicant respectfully submits that independent claims 1, 17, and 31 are allowable over the combination of Rudy, Goodwin, and Lea.

Furthermore, claims 2-16, 18-30, and 32-35, which depend from the independent claims, are allowable for at least the same reasons.

III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, the Applicant respectfully submits that all claims are in a condition for allowance. The Applicant respectfully requests, therefore, that the rejections be withdrawn and that this application now be allowed.

This Amendment is being timely filed by facsimile transmission on January 15, 2004. Should additional fees or an extension of time be deemed necessary for consideration of this Amendment, such fees or extension are hereby requested and the Commissioner is authorized to charge deposit account number 19-0733 for the payment of the requisite fee. If anything further is desirable to place the application in even better form for allowance, the Examiner is respectfully requested to telephone the undersigned representative at (503) 425-6800.

Respectfully submitted,

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